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6 SOVIET MIDDLE EAST-MEDITERRANEAN FRONTIER:
EXPANSION AND SECURITY.

10 William M. Stokes



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**SOVIET MIDDLE EAST-MEDITERRANEAN FRONTIER:
EXPANSION AND SECURITY**

by

William M. Stokes

20 April 1978

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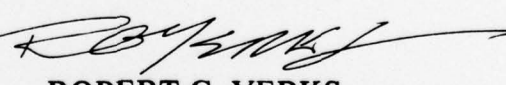
FOREWORD

This memorandum examines Soviet political, military, economic and ideological activity in the Middle East and views it as suggesting interest in a regional frontier which will serve both security and expansion functions. The author states that the Soviets appear to have added to their security by projecting their power, particularly military power, into the frontier zone; however, the price has been high in political and economic terms as well as in its potential for conflict. He concludes that, as things stand now, Soviet expansion in the region has not conveyed a substantial measure of power nor increased Soviet security to a significant degree.

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This memorandum was prepared as a contribution to the field of national security research and study. As such, it does not reflect the official view of the College, by the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

COLONEL WILLIAM M. STOKES III, is currently Chief of the Politico-Military Division, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans. Prior to this assignment, he was a Fellow at the Harvard Center for International Affairs. Colonel Stokes graduated from the Virginia Military Institute and holds masters' degrees from Florida State University in international affairs and from Pennsylvania State University in public administration. He has commanded armor and special forces units in Vietnam and Germany and served with the Organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

SOVIET MIDDLE EAST-MEDITERRANEAN FRONTIER: EXPANSION AND SECURITY

The Middle East-Mediterranean region is an area in which varied interests converge. Underdeveloped states with wide disparities in wealth are trying to cope with monumental problems of development and internal stability, while contending with major powers on the world scene. The enormous energy needs of the industrialized world and the oil resources of the Middle East have brought users and suppliers into an economic confrontation of global magnitude. Massive arms transfers into the region, the Arab-Israeli conflict, inter-Arab disputes, and the Palestinian question have contributed to regional instability, continuous conflict, and potential superpower confrontation.

Warsaw Pact and NATO forces confront each other on the northern fringes of the region and their naval forces face each other at sea. The major powers are entangled in a web of relationships involving themselves, their security blocs, and states of the region. The Soviets have overcome containment at the European rimland and the Eastern Mediterranean has become an area of focus for US-Soviet competition. The scope and intensity of Soviet activities in the region can no longer be justified in terms of a relentless pursuit of warm water ports. Why have the Soviets turned their attention to the region?

It is not the intent of this discussion to drum up support for a geopolitical justification of Soviet behavior toward the Middle East-Mediterranean region, but Soviet political, military, economic, and ideological activity does suggest interest in a regional frontier which will serve both security and expansion functions. Yet, as this paper argues, the Soviets have been unable to organize such a frontier or establish a sphere of influence in the region. Expansion has not always conveyed a substantial measure of power nor increased Soviet security to a significant degree; by some measures, Soviet security may even have been reduced.

FRONTIER ACTIVITY DOES MATTER

To suggest that it is essential for a state to maintain secure frontiers is, of course, to state the obvious. But frontier activity does matter and is germane to this analysis. The Soviet fear of aggression is not without historical justification nor can it be denied that hostility exists along the Soviet-Chinese border and that Western policies and military capabilities warrant concern. The Soviets, as do other states, defend against military aggression and the penetration of hostile influences. As a result of technological advances, security involves far more than land control; defense is now a multienvironmental problem, involving land, outer space, oceans, and air-space, all of which require security activities beyond national boundaries.

Land frontiers have historically borne Soviet territorial growth. This is not to say, however, that Soviet geography must continuously grow to insure state survival, that all territorial expansion must be peripheral, or that expansion is aimed solely at territorial growth. Soviet expansion in the past has conveyed economic benefits to be sure, but an enlarged power base and absolute security of the state, its resources, and its political apparatus have been prime reasons for territorial acquisition and control, as well as determinants of the organization of the state's territory.

Soviet territorial growth has carried with it increased area to defend, security benefits accruing from increased territorial depth, and improved possibilities for self-sufficiency and attainment of capabilities often associated with inventories of national power.

For the purposes of this analysis, boundaries, buffers, and frontier zones comprise the Soviet strategic frontier. Soviet boundaries identify areas controlled by organized physical presence. Within these

boundaries the Soviets seek full control over the entry of influences considered detrimental to their interests.

Soviet buffers serve as security cushions by providing stand-off distance against attack (a feature which has diminished in value somewhat because of technological advances); acting as filters against hostile penetration; and serving as conduits through which Soviet political, economic, and ideological initiatives gain entry into the West. The high degree of integration achieved through Warsaw Pact and COMECON associations has provided the Soviets considerable control over the buffer states and their resources, and has pushed the Soviet sphere of influence well westward. The Soviets use buffers as deliberately organized segments of their land frontiers, where such buffers are feasible.

Frontier zones, according to this analysis, support Soviet objectives where neither a buffer zone nor assimilation of territory is desirable or feasible. Frontier zones may vary in terms of size, location, and degree of influence depending upon Soviet policies and the success of Soviet political, military, economic, and ideological forces in those areas. There is little indication that frontier zones are being prepared for formal integration, although ultimate Soviet goals do embrace ideological integration and political dominance. This analysis suggests that the Middle East-Mediterranean region constitutes a frontier zone which is an essential part of the Soviet strategic frontier.

MIDDLE EAST-MEDITERRANEAN FRONTIER ZONE

Unchallenged entry into the Mediterranean Sea has been a traditional Russian goal. Interests in the Black Sea and Turkish Straits flow naturally from the Soviet Union's need to defend its southwestern border and establish relationships beyond its borders. The motivation for ports and interests in adjacent southern border areas long kept the Soviet focus on Turkey, Iran (Persia), and Afghanistan. Courtship, penetration, and boundary adjustments marked these relationships. Events at the close of World War II preserved Soviet expansion and influence in peripheral areas that provide access to the region. While the Soviets have been unable to acquire bases along the Turkish Straits and attempts to alter provisions of the Montreux Convention have been unsuccessful, they have had little difficulty in passing most types of warships through the Straits.

Western containment policies constrained Soviet moves toward the

Middle East in the early postwar years. But the withdrawal of French and British forces from the Middle East in the mid-1950's (later from east of Suez), seething nationalism, French and British intervention in the Suez area in 1956, adverse local reactions to the Baghdad Pact, and opportunities for identifying with and supporting anticolonial movements and wars of national liberation helped stimulate more active Soviet participation in regional affairs. The Arab-Israeli conflict offered opportunities to the Soviets as well. The proximity of the region to Soviet borders has tended to favor active involvement there.

The frontier zone has significance from a military point of view because it extends along NATO's southern flank. Military operations (offensive and defensive) from the zone could permit engagement of NATO naval forces, strikes against sea lanes, and operations to control air-space. In the event of hostilities, the Turkish, Gibraltar, and Bab el Mandeb Straits, and the Suez Canal would become "choke points" at which access to the zone might be influenced or controlled.

While states of the frontier zone do not have a strong political basis for world leadership, oil resources have permitted the Arab states to enjoy political clout and considerable financial independence despite regional political disunity, disparities in wealth, and underdevelopment. The oil resources are vital to Western Europe and Japan and important to the United States as well. Interdiction of oil supplies by military forces or through political leverage would be highly detrimental to Western economic and security interests.

A number of factors have contributed to the dynamics of the frontier zone and influenced activities there. The zone is a large geostrategic region occupied by conflicting parties and caught between conflicting interests of great powers—a "shatterbelt" some have called it.¹ The colonial experience was followed by a vacuum which drew the superpowers to the region, cold war rivalry has been a fact of life there since 1947. Further, the rise of independent states, nationalism, irredentism, economic underdevelopment, and the Arab-Israeli conflict have intensified the centrifugal nature of the region, making it a highly complex area in which to conduct foreign policy.

The Soviets have adjusted to the vagaries of "shatterbelt" interactions; they have shown reasonable patience and flexibility, together with a willingness to nibble and apply pressure or contract their efforts, depending upon perceived opportunities, political resistance, and dangers.

While the widespread Soviet presence in the Middle

East-Mediterranean region is generally accepted, there is a lack of consensus concerning Soviet motives and the nature of the expansion. One argument holds that Soviet activities in the area are a natural result of the attainment of superpower status and a necessary accommodation to growing requirements of a multipolar world rather than a deliberate scheme of empire. A presence in the region was essential to projection of the Soviet image as a great power and leader of the Socialist world, so the argument goes.²

Another view suggests that Soviet movement into the region was designed to create a zone of penetration and influence "different in nature from the communist-controlled glacis to the West, but analagous in its imperial function."³ Carrying the imperialism theme further, Laqueur suggests that "once a sphere of interest has been established, the imperial power is tempted to look for yet another one to enhance its security further."⁴ With reasonable control having been established in Eastern Europe, the Soviets have felt sufficiently confident to expand their activities elsewhere.

Analysts also advance notions that the Soviets were forced into the region by US threats to their security or that they moved into the vacuum created by the departure of colonial powers at the invitation of regional states.

The nature of the expansion has drawn comment as well. Pinchuk points out that the Soviets have considerable experience in frontier activities near their borders, but their actions in the Middle East-Mediterranean area seem different, a departure from past expansionism in terms of their geographic pattern and implementation techniques.⁵

The arguments just presented are instructive because they show that experts in Soviet affairs agree that expansion has taken place, although they differ in their views of Soviet motivations. The arguments also suggest that definitional problems may contribute to the lack of agreement concerning Soviet motivations, particularly the definitions of such terms as "imperialism" and "influence." There is clearly no simple answer to the question of Soviet motives; most of the reasons above have likely figured in Soviet decisions regarding the frontier. It is not difficult to understand why the Soviets want to maintain a military presence in the region or why more widespread international relationships are desirable. What is more difficult to explain is the degree of influence sought by the Soviets and the destabilizing uses to which they put such influence.

Soviet foreign policy transactions within the region have involved money, men, goods, and ideas applied through political, military, economic, and ideological forces. The patterns of interaction of these forces can be charted reasonably well over time and provide a crude means for evaluating the contribution of these forces to security and expansion. The sections that follow address in greater detail Soviet regional objectives and the application of resources in the frontier zone in terms of expansion and security.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

While it is beyond the scope of this analysis to describe broad Soviet foreign policy objectives, it should be noted that objectives for the Middle East-Mediterranean region appear to be supportive of the Soviet aim of achieving dominance over a Communist world and consistent with such intermediate goals as achievement of the political, socio-psychological, economic, and military means to provide for unchallenged security of the state. Under these overarching goals are several objectives of particular relevance to the Middle East-Mediterranean region which warrant our attention. First, the Soviets seek to acquire influence over resources, actors, and events within the frontier zone at the expense of the United States, Western Europe, and China. Second, the Soviets seek to establish links with "progressive" Arab regimes and promote the noncapitalist path to development. Third, they seek to achieve increased security while avoiding a major military confrontation.

In their political transactions, the Soviets have used the full range of instruments normally available to a state, including subversive and propaganda activities. The use of political symbols of cooperation such as treaties and formal agreements has been characteristic of the formal transactions. Policies have been carried out with flexibility characteristic of "peaceful coexistence," allowing the reconciliation of pragmatic interests and peaceful competition. Soviet political transactions have also reflected caution and boldness—caution to avoid confrontation and undue risks and boldness to seize opportunities not attended by excessive risk. There is little evidence that the Soviet thrusts in the region are embodied in well-defined, time-phased plans, but recent Soviet political misfortunes should not be viewed as an indication that the Soviets have no plans for the region or that they plan poorly.

McLaurin suggests that regional goals since 1958 have been directed more toward increasing Soviet influence than supporting defense objectives and his argument has merit.⁶ Given the Soviet achievement of nuclear parity with the United States, basic defense objectives may indeed be less important in the region than expansion and consolidation of influence. But Soviet military capabilities in the region have been strengthened and such influence as has accrued has generally been supportive of security needs. Influence and security are clearly interrelated and tend to be mutually reinforcing.

Soviet political activity now takes place throughout the frontier zone. As points of political contact have grown in number, the movement of money, men, materiel, and ideas has increased in scope, geographic distribution, and complexity. Through these political transactions the Soviets have sought to enlarge their power and influence vis-à-vis the West by exploiting the Arab-Israeli problem, promoting Arab dependency on Soviet support and controlling the movement of resources into the region, maintaining a military capability within the region befitting a global power, and demonstrating Soviet leadership in the world revolution and support for Third World aspirations.

To suggest that any state which seeks to increase its influence outside its boundaries as expansionist is, of course, misleading. But when one looks at the growth of Soviet linkage in the Middle East-Mediterranean region since 1955, particularly the scope, intensity, and distribution of diplomatic, military, and economic activities, it is fair to say that the Soviet presence and intercourse have expanded. Further, the regional objectives suggest an outward thrust and degree of permanent interest in regional activities which are clearly expansionist in character. Soviet activities also appear to be consistent with, if not linked to, objectives designed to contain China, improve the military position with regard to NATO and create divisiveness among Alliance members, and increase Soviet influence in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Frontier areas can be incorporated into expanding states, but there is little evidence of a Soviet push in this direction. Even the establishment of a Soviet sphere of influence, where no threat of competition need be tolerated, seems unlikely. The Soviets, riding so high politically in the early 1970's, have suffered setbacks within the frontier zone which challenge their search for a sphere of influence. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to determine who is manipulating whom in Soviet-Arab relations.

The Soviets have been unable to cope effectively with the dynamics of the region. Shifts in local alliances have affected the Soviet presence, allowing the establishment of a significant presence, as in the case of Egypt, then requiring abrupt removal of that presence. As relations with Syria and Egypt have soured, greater attention has been paid to Libya and East Africa. The Soviets may agree with many Arab objectives, but differ in priorities that they attach to them; such differences have helped prevent consolidation of Soviet influence in their frontier zone.

The region is not a Western sphere of influence either and Soviet efforts have helped the Arabs thwart Western pressures. But the Soviets will be unable to deny Western access to the region. On balance it seems that the spread of Soviet influence has been temporarily halted, leaving the Soviets with several basic options. They could abandon their efforts in the region, but such a move might damage their prestige among Third World states, damage the credibility of Soviet foreign policy initiatives throughout the world, and impair Soviet security activities within the region. There is little in Soviet history that suggests a permanent retrenchment would be considered seriously. The Soviets might also continue to expand their efforts on the African fringes of the frontier zone. Significant and permanent expansion beyond an unconsolidated frontier zone, however, carries with it risks of overextension. The Soviets appear to be unwilling to risk permanent rupture with the Arab states or imperil broader objectives being sought with the West through detente. They seem to be attempting to hold the best position of influence possible, accepting temporary changes in fortune while awaiting new opportunities to reassert themselves in the frontier zone. In the meantime they are probing areas beyond the zone.

Whether the Soviets have added to their security is another matter. The Soviet military presence in the region does constrain US and NATO options and pose a threat of counteraction, but it is unlikely that the current array of Soviet forces in the frontier zone would play a decisive role in a major conflict. Through their activities the Soviets have contributed to tensions which mark the region as an area of potential conflict. US-Soviet conflict in the region is not inevitable and both parties seek to avoid major crises there, but conflict is possible nevertheless. By enlarging the scope and intensity of their activities in the area, the Soviets have created a situation in which extraordinary control must be maintained to prevent a conflict which could widen into the very war that they declare they wish to avoid.

MILITARY FORCES

While their intentions are far from clear, the Soviets are increasing their military capabilities across the board. They have strengthened their capabilities to defend border and buffer areas and improved their capabilities for conducting military operations in distant areas. Soviet security needs within the Middle East-Mediterranean frontier zone have been used to justify the movement of military forces into the zone as well as the geographic expansion of their areas of operation. Further, military forces have been essential to Soviet efforts to gain influence among regional states.

Soviet military objectives within the zone support regional and global policies and generate military requirements that must be met. The objectives are designed with both security and political influence in mind. These twin objectives are tightly interwoven and both are pursued concurrently.

From the standpoint of security, the Soviets seek to extend their flank security to the south and southwest and reduce their vulnerability to hostile military operations. Logical supporting tasks include countering the US capability to conduct nuclear strikes against the Warsaw Pact with aircraft and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM's) deployed in the Mediterranean, countering the US capability for projecting nonnuclear power against the Warsaw Pact members, constraining US freedom of action in the region, deterring US military intervention in the Middle East, and denying NATO access to oil through Mediterranean sea lanes in times of hostilities. The destruction of the CENTO alliance remains a goal, but the significance of that pact can hardly justify serious Soviet concern. No less important than the security objective is the use of military forces to contribute to Soviet influence and prestige among states of the region by exploiting military interests of Arab states and bolstering friendly regimes. The deterrence of Israel attacks on friendly Arab states has also been an objective in times of crisis.

In pursuing the tasks above the Soviets use deployed forces and military assistance. They appear to be seeking to accomplish their aims without a military confrontation with the United States. This is not to suggest, however, that the Soviets are unwilling to take risks; they have shown an increased willingness to apply military power and risk confrontation in the region, although they have not cast caution to the wind.⁷ The increased assertiveness may be due, in part, to the achievement of nuclear parity with the United States.

The Navy provides the strongest and most visible Soviet military capability in the Middle East-Mediterranean frontier zone. The Mediterranean Squadron of the Black Sea fleet, augmented by elements from fleets external to the zone, maintains capabilities to conduct surveillance and intelligence operations, countership combat, and antisubmarine warfare against US ballistic missile submarines. A primary function of the Mediterranean Squadron is to act as a counterweight to the US Sixth Fleet and to neutralize that fleet in time of war. In addition, the Squadron performs important symbolic functions by maintaining a highly visible deployment (22-30 major combatants) and conducting port calls to "show the flag" and demonstrate Soviet strength.⁸ The ability to conduct intelligence collection and combat missions is also maintained by Soviet Naval Aviation from peripheral land areas. Further, the Soviets maintain a limited capability to conduct amphibious operations. Soviet naval capabilities are believed to be constrained by logistics, limited short support facilities, and an inadequate capability for providing air cover to deployed forces.

Soviet naval activity in the region has expanded since 1955 in numbers of combatants deployed, quality of ships deployed, numbers of port calls, ship-days of deployment, and geographic areas covered.⁹ Deployments have now stabilized at levels lower than the early 1970's, but force modernization has continued and the force presence has taken on a permanent character.

Although numerically inferior to NATO forces in the frontier zone, Soviet naval forces do provide a challenge to NATO. Whether the Soviet naval growth was precipitated by US Sixth Fleet capabilities, particularly SLBM's, or was a conscious act geared to expansionist plans is a matter of debate. It has been argued, for example, that Soviet naval forces expanded to meet compelling defense requirements resulting from US capabilities to strike the Soviet Union from the Mediterranean with nuclear weapons.¹⁰ Since a relatively limited portion of the US nuclear strike capability is maintained by the Sixth Fleet, others offer the notion that Soviet nuclear defense in the region is of marginal utility.¹¹ But on balance, Soviet naval forces do provide significant defense against the Sixth Fleet at a reasonable distance from the Soviet border without unduly provoking confrontation. Soviet naval forces could also be used offensively to protect the southern flank of Warsaw Pact forces attacking NATO and to interdict oil resources. Although the day-to-day naval balance in the region tends to favor the United States,

the Soviets have demonstrated a significant capability to reinforce the Mediterranean Squadron.¹² The Soviets cannot expell US forces from the frontier zone, but they can share such influence as accrues from peacetime deployments.

A recent survey of the Soviet political use of armed forces in the Middle East points to an increased Soviet propensity to perform combat missions where the risk of involvement with the United States is low. Prior to 1968, the study reports, limited combat missions were flown in Yemen (1967). Since 1968, however, it has been reported that the Soviets have flown air combat missions in the Sudanese civil war (1971), in Iraq against the Kurds (1974), and in Egypt against Israel (air defense, 1970).¹³ Additionally, the Soviets deployed significant forces to Egypt during the period 1970-72 to man surface-to-air missiles and Soviet military forces have performed airlift and mine clearing missions.

Military bases, facility arrangements, and anchorages have played an important role in the organization of the Middle East-Mediterranean frontier zone and the conduct of operations there. Forward basing (air and naval) has helped the Soviets overcome geographic and force constraints by providing opportunities for expanded force presence; increasing the responsiveness of support; extending the duration and area coverage of deployments; permitting the deployment of more balanced force capabilities; improving capabilities for command, control, and communications; and facilitating military assistance. Such basing adds to defense capabilities in the frontier zone by compensating for the Soviet lack of carrier-based air support; enabling the Soviets to maintain a close and continuous watch on the Eastern Mediterranean, Suez Canal, and Red Sea; and supporting capabilities required to execute contingency plans.

The Soviets have had mixed results with their efforts to obtain and retain facilities in the region. They have sought (and sometimes obtained) facilities in strategic areas, but stable arrangements, supportive of military and political requirements throughout the zone, have remained elusive. Efforts to obtain bases in Turkish Thrace from which to ensure control over the Turkish Straits have been unsuccessful. The Soviets do have access to facilities in Bulgaria, however. Naval facilities in Albania have been denied since 1961. Recent attempts to negotiate support facilities with Yugoslavia were reportedly rebuffed, but the final chapter on the Soviet use of Yugoslav facilities may not have been wirtten.¹⁴ It has been reported that the Soviets have been using Yugoslav facilities for limited naval repairs for some

time.¹⁵ Facility rights in Yugoslavia could lead to increased Soviet activity in the Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas.

During the past 10 years the Soviets have had important base and facility rights in the Eastern Mediterranean. In Egypt, they had access to facilities in Alexandria, Port Said, and Mersa Metruh from 1967 until 1972, when President Sadat reportedly terminated the arrangements. In addition, it has been reported that six Egyptian airfields were under varying degrees of Soviet control. These airfields were used to support naval operations and defend Egypt against Israeli deep-penetration raids during the "War of Attrition." Syria has also provided access to facilities at Latakia and Tartus. Prior to the reported Egyptian-Soviet rift, facilities in Egypt and Syria were the focal points of Soviet support activity. They provided a highly visible Soviet presence, served as conduits through which military assistance moved, supported a wide range of military operations, and contributed to the deterrence of Israeli attacks against these facilities. Data collected by Robert Weinland suggests that the sharp increase in the sustained Soviet naval capability in the region was due, in part, to the growth of distant support facilities.¹⁶ The reduction in deployments since 1972 can be attributed, in part, to reversals in Arab policies to provide access to such facilities.

Soviet initiatives for facilities have now shifted to Somalia, where a major base has been developed at Berbera. Facilities in Somalia, together with anchorages off Socotra Island and access to Aden in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen now enable the Soviets to operate more freely south of the Suez area; they compensate for aircraft-related facilities no longer available along the Mediterranean littoral, but cannot replace the denied naval logistic facilities there.

Efforts to obtain continuous access to facilities other than those above have not met with great success. Current limitations on facilities notwithstanding, the Soviets continue to pay port calls to friendly states along the Mediterranean littoral.

Do the Soviets need Middle East bases to support their objectives? Permanent bases may not be required if access is gained for specific missions. The quest for permanent facilities will inevitably create friction between the Soviets and strongly nationalistic states of the region and meet intensified Western pressure. But technological developments notwithstanding, successful Soviet expansion will require forward basing or at least support for forward deployed forces. Facilities are also needed to provide clusters of Soviet presence. The

balance sheet to date suggests a lack of permanency associated with Soviet bases and facilities. This is not to say that facilities will never be made available again, but it does place the dependability of such arrangements in question.

The initiation of Soviet military assistance to the region is generally traced to arms transfers to Egypt via Czechoslovakia in 1955, stimulated by Western constraints on arms supplies, mutual Arab and Soviet desires to undermine Western influence, and an increased Soviet willingness to project its power. Soviet military assistance has been designed primarily to establish relations which insure a permanent breach of Western containment efforts and counter the effectiveness of NATO and CENTO; expand influence and prestige without undue risk of major confrontation or destruction of detente; establish and maintain the Soviet Union's image as a strong, anticolonial supporter of the Third World; and establish relations which require Soviet presence and encourage access to support facilities. Military assistance has also been used to replace Western dominance as the region's arms supplier; assist in penetrating the Arab world; facilitate the movement of ideas; and exploit local tensions, particularly those associated with Arab-Israeli relationships.

Figure 1 suggests the magnitude of Soviet military assistance in terms of area coverage and estimated value during the period 1965-74.

In their arms transactions the Soviets have not appeared overly concerned with the domestic orientations of recipients, but the expansion of their assistance has not proceeded without caution. In an effort to control the manner in which their military resources are used and insure reasonable compatibility with their objectives, a number of restraints have been practiced by the Soviets, e.g., restrictions have been placed on certain types of weapons, based upon their advanced technology, decisive nature, or offensive character; consideration has been given the absorptive capabilities of recipients; and efforts have been made to provide some control over the nature and duration of operations through manipulation of spare parts supply.

Many observers argue that Soviet military assistance has been designed primarily to build influence rather than effective Arab military forces, pointing to the nature of the materiel provided, the degree of training provided recipients, and the application of the restraints above.¹⁷ Others suggest that assistance patterns have changed over the years and that states of the region increasingly have received more modern equipment and improved training which has resulted in a significant upgrading of Arab force capabilities.

Figure 1

Soviet Military Assistance
Middle East-Mediterranean Frontier Zone
(1965-74)

<u>Recipients</u>	<u>\$US Million</u>
Algeria	248
Egypt	2,465
Iraq	1,343
Lebanon	4
Libya	425
Morocco	9
Somalia	134
S. Yemen	114
Sudan	65
Syria	1,758
Yemen	27
	<u>\$6,592</u>

Source of Data: US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditure and Arms Transfers 1966-75*, p. 79.

Since 1973, President Sadat of Egypt has expressed disappointment concerning the types and quantity of weapons provided, as well as the pace of delivery. Sadat's concern has been fueled, in part, by domestic politics which require that he satisfy the powerful military elites of his country. Some commentators argue, however, that the Soviets have reinforced Egypt significantly since the alleged 1972 rift by providing weapons, ammunition, and spare parts through third countries.¹⁸ The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute has reported that the Soviets have transferred a sizable number of tanks to Egypt; considerable materiel was also reported to have been provided Iraq and Syria.¹⁹ The International Institute for Strategic Studies has indicated that no transfers have taken place since 1975, although its data over the period 1975-76 suggest materiel and budget increases in Egypt.²⁰ It is apparent that some Soviet assistance has continued since the 1973 war, but reliable data are lacking concerning the exact quantities and types of equipment transferred. Israeli reports maintain that the Soviets have

continued to provide arms assistance to Egypt because the "failure to do so would end their influence in Cairo" and drive the Egyptians to Western sources.²¹ The sheer magnitude of the Soviet materiel in Arab hands today would make a major shift to Western sources appear impractical. Further, the Arabs can hardly be optimistic over the prospects for massive Western arms transfers.

Training assistance has also been an important feature of Soviet military aid. Soviet advisers, inadequate for Arab requirements in the mid-1960's, were increased significantly during the post-1967 period. In addition to their obvious training function, advisers have served as symbols of Soviet technological advancement and channels for transmitting ideas. It has been estimated that over 8,500 of 9,450 Soviet military advisers (Soviet defense forces excluded) serving in the Third World in 1971 were deployed in the Middle East-Mediterranean frontier zone, which attests to the importance of the region.²² While advisers have provided increased points of interaction within the frontier zone, their presence frequently has irritated recipients because of the unequal relationships they represent. Thus their effectiveness as conduits of ideological and political influence is believed to have been limited.

The overall value of the military assistance program to Soviet security is far from clear. Military assistance served security needs well in helping the Soviets break out of the containment posture in the early years of the aid program and by serving as quid pro quo for access to facilities which contributed to an expanded and permanent force presence in the region. On the negative side, however, Soviet military assistance has fanned tensions in the region and may have created a potential for involvement in a conflict that detracts from Soviet security.

From a standpoint of expansion, military assistance has created new relationships for the Soviets. While Soviet influence appears to have increased in the region since aid was initiated and several states currently have a high degree of dependency on Soviet arms, states of the region have resisted political and ideological influence. Military assistance has not proved to be a guarantor of influence, but has conveyed to the Soviets some prestige among Third World states. Soviet assistance has been an expensive venture for the less affluent states, since it has done little to stimulate the economic development required for repayment of loans or to improve the economic situation generally.

Although economic motives are not a primary Soviet consideration in providing military assistance, recipients of Soviet Bloc military aid do tend to be the major Third World trading partners of the Bloc.²³

ECONOMIC FORCES

Hard-pressed by postwar reconstruction tasks, the Soviets did not turn their attention toward economic opportunities in the Third World until 1954. Since then, Soviet economic assistance programs to the Third World have been concentrated heavily in the Middle East-Mediterranean region. It has been estimated, for example, that during the first 19 years of such assistance, roughly half of the aid went to Middle East and North African states, which suggests the priority attached to states to the south and southwest of Soviet borders. As Figure 2 shows, considerable economic assistance was provided the region between 1954 and 1975. Emphasis has been placed upon industrialization, electrification and exploitation of rivers, exploration of mineral resources, and such specialized assistance as development of the maritime sector.²⁴

Figure 2 also suggests the priority of assistance within the frontier zone. In view of Egypt's geostrategic and political significance, it is not surprising that it has been the primary recipient of economic aid. Assistance to Turkey has been given a high priority because of its geographic location and opportunities for weakening its participation in NATO.

Soviet trade within the frontier zone tends to reflect the same patterns and priorities as economic assistance. Trade has remained modest, but has grown as Soviet relations within the region have increased. The relationship of trade and aid has been readily apparent. Exports to the region have often been the industrial equipment required to support aid projects. Repayment for goods supplied has frequently been made in finished goods, agricultural products, or local currencies, thus establishing essentially a barter system.

Soviet trade in the region has met with difficulties and has not been a decisive factor in relationships there. Soviet relationships cause Middle East and Mediterranean trading partners to chafe for a variety of reasons, e.g., Soviet reexportation of imported goods has led to lower prices in world markets, exports to the Soviet Union have resulted in a loss of convertible currency, and importing states have complained about the slow arrival and poor quality of Soviet goods.

Figure 2

Soviet Economic Assistance
to the Middle East-Mediterranean Region
1954-75

<u>Recipients</u>	<u>\$US Million</u>
Algeria	425
Egypt	1,300
Iraq	549
Morocco	98
Somalia	153
South Yemen	15
Sudan	64
Syria	417
Tunisia	34
Turkey	1,180
Yemen	98
	<u>\$4,333</u>

Source of Data: US Congress, Joint Economic Committee., *Soviet Economy in a New Perspective*, Joint Committee Print, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1976, p. 294.

The importance of oil warrants special treatment for this commodity. Oil must be considered in both current and long-range geostrategic contexts. The Soviets have sought to have oil used as a weapon against NATO, portraying it as an instrument of anti-imperialist struggle, an action which has reduced NATO's capability to support military operations and contributed to domestic emergencies that have helped fragment the Western Alliance. The Soviets have supported OPEC actions against the West and encouraged embargoes and nationalization of Western oil facilities. Further, the Soviets have attempted to dissuade oil-producing states of the region from investing capital reserves in the West. There is also growing concern in the West that the Soviets will seek increased influence over oil exports from the region in view of long-term Soviet petroleum needs.

The Soviets apply economic resources in the Middle

East-Mediterranean frontier zone primarily to support political, military, and ideological objectives; economic benefits appear to be secondary. Soviet economic assistance does not appear to have led to the degree of influence sought by the Soviets nor has the Soviet development model served states of the region well. Economic forces have been used to move ideas and goods, nevertheless, and additional points of interface have been created. In addition, some prestige has accrued from the export of Soviet technology and dependency upon Soviet economic support has increased. Economic relations have not played a major role in buttressing Soviet security, except to the degree that assistance has contributed to facility use and Soviet influence has contributed to NATO's concern about oil supplies.

Economic programs have been expensive for the Soviets, but the continued application of economic forces within the region suggests that penetration opportunities are perceived to outweigh the economic disadvantages. Further, the Soviets realize that the West will continue its competition through economic means. The Soviets, therefore, must stay in the "race."

IDEOLOGICAL FORCES

There is no evidence to suggest that the Soviets have given up long-standing ideological objectives. Nor have the Soviets completely discarded ideological considerations in their relationships with the Third World. Within the Middle East-Mediterranean region (and Third World generally), the Soviets have tried to portray their approach to development as "the" answer, emphasizing the intellectual, political, and economic efficiency of the Soviet model; blame the development problems of all societies on the capitalist system; and identify the United States with Israel and themselves with "progressive" Arab regimes.

Soviet ideological opportunities in the Middle East were enhanced greatly by the Soviet movement into the region in 1955. In a sense, the Soviets jumped over an ideological barrier as well as a geostrategic one.²⁵ Marxist-Leninist thought was certainly not the only justification for the Soviet move into the Middle East (and not the major one), but it did provide ideological underpinnings for the expansion much as Pan-Slavism and Christianity did for pre-1917 expansion.²⁶

Since the mid-1960's, the Soviets have placed less emphasis on ideology in justifying their presence in the Middle East-Mediterranean

region and their support for states of the area. Further, they have taken a more pragmatic approach to achievement of their long-range goals. Laqueur suggests that Soviet ideological initiatives have tended to collide with populist, national-social ideological thrusts which seem to prevail within the region. Nationalism, mixed with strong religious beliefs, he maintains, has had a negative influence on the absorption of Communist ideology by states of the area.²⁷ When states have turned toward socialism, it has tended to be more of a national variety than international in nature, as a recent news report from Cairo suggests:

We are neither a capitalist nor a communist state. We are seeking to build a socialist system based on our own reality. We are a people who cling to their religion and who do not seek a bloody conflict among classes but social peace through peaceful dialog.²⁸

Another factor influencing acceptance of Soviet-sponsored ideology has been resistance within the region to the "democratization" of political life. Military elites particularly have resisted Marxism-Leninism and frequently have demonstrated an unwillingness to share power extensively with civilian leaders.²⁹ The power of military elites has posed a dilemma for the Soviets; they must evaluate the desirability of supporting nonmilitary factions where opportunities for ideological penetration appear to exist, although such support potentially jeopardizes relationships with military leaders. Elites of the region have shown a propensity for switching views, which makes them, at best, moving targets for Soviet exploitation. The Arab-Israeli confrontation has also acted as a brake on Soviet ideological initiatives by serving as a focal point for Arab interests, emotions, and energies, thus reducing somewhat their concern over the ideological struggle with the West.

Ideological pursuits in the Middle East-Mediterranean frontier zone have not made a measurable contribution to Soviet security. Soviet ideological thrusts have taken on an expansionist character, however, since they have been used to promote the movement and growth of ideas throughout the region. Ideological forces have caused considerable political disruption in the frontier zone and have served as a counterweight to Western ideas, but the Soviets have found it difficult to overcome cultural constraints and consolidate ideological gains.

CONCLUSIONS

In analyzing Soviet activities in the Middle East-Mediterranean

region this paper has drawn selectively from the literature of political geography. The frontier zone construct may strain somewhat previous understandings of that term, but analyses do suggest that the Soviets have taken actions in the region which relate strongly to expansion and security functions normally ascribed to frontiers. It is not suggested that Soviet activities in the region can be justified by geographic determinism, but there can be little doubt that geography has been and continues to be an important consideration in Soviet planning.

The Soviets have not described the Middle East-Mediterranean region as a frontier zone, as presented in this paper, nor do they appear to have a plan for integration or assimilating states of the zone. The Soviets have, nevertheless, used forces at their disposal to conduct activities in support of expansionist objectives there. They have increased their activity in the region in terms of presence and space, and now have a permanent presence well beyond their borders and traditional buffer zones—a presence which provides increased room for exercising political, military, economic, and ideological forces.

The Soviets have also expanded their influence since 1955, although their success in institutionalizing and stabilizing this influence has been limited. The dynamic nature of regional relationships, vast cultural differences between the Soviets and the Arabs, Western interests, and Soviet-US relationships of a more global nature have thwarted consolidation of influence. Without such a consolidation, it will be difficult for the Soviets to gain substantial control over actors and events within the frontier zone.

The Soviets, nevertheless, are determined to play an important role in regional affairs. More moderate Soviet-Egyptian relations (not necessarily permanent) may evolve as the Soviets step up their efforts to obtain major responsibilities in regional peace initiatives. While it is too early to forecast the outcome of Soviet adventures in the Horn of Africa, conflicts there are rapidly involving more states of the Middle East-Mediterranean region. The time may be approaching to add more states to the frontier zone.

The Soviets have also used political, military, and economic forces in the frontier zone to meet perceived security needs. The security objectives are tied more closely to US-Soviet/Warsaw Pact-NATO competition than threats from regional states or China. In view of US strategic nuclear capabilities, the frontier zone may not be vital to Soviet security, but military forces in the region do contribute to perceived requirements for deterrence and defense. The prudent Soviet

planner would consider projection of military forces into the Middle East-Mediterranean region essential for either offensive or defensive missions.

By most measures, the Soviets appear to have added to their security by projecting their power, particularly military power, into the frontier zone. NATO forces have had less flexibility since Soviet military capabilities in the region took on a permanent character. But the price of forward deployment in the region has been high in political and economic terms as well as its potential for conflict. As Soviet interests in the region have expanded in a geographic sense, so have security requirements. The Soviets, however, have been unable to forward deploy and reliably base all the forces required to defend the frontier zone.

The Soviets are faced with the task of organizing the Middle East-Mediterranean frontier. Without the achievement of more durable influence they will be unable to establish a sphere of influence. As things stand now, Soviet expansion in the region has not conveyed a substantial measure of power nor increased Soviet security to a significant degree; by some measures Soviet security may even have been reduced.

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20. Abstract: This memorandum examines Soviet political, economic and ideological activity in the Middle East and views it as suggesting interest in a regional frontier which will serve both security and expansion functions. The Soviets appear to have added to their security by projecting their power, particularly military power, into the frontier zone; however, the price has been high in political and economic terms as well as in its potential for conflict. The author concludes that, as things stand now, Soviet expansion in the region has not conveyed a substantial measure of power nor increased Soviet security to a significant degree.

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